

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Test Scores Rise For Second Straight Year

Low Performing Schools Improve Significantly

(July 27, 2009) Overall student performance on state standardized tests for 2009 increased for the second consecutive year at a level comparable to the 2008 gains, according to preliminary results released to the district by the State Department of Education.

A total of 28 schools improved over last year. Thirteen of the schools raised their overall school index by more than 3 points. One school maintained the same level of achievement, while seven moved down. Six new and redesigned schools took the Connecticut Mastery Test and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test for the first time, and therefore, have no comparative data on which to measure progress.

Superintendent Steven J. Adamowski characterized the back-to-back test-score increases as further evidence that the Hartford Board of Education's plan for closing the achievement gap between city students and their suburban counterparts is on the right track.

"People were skeptical at first," Dr. Adamowski said. "But we've proven that you can have high-performing schools in low-income areas. Now we have to sustain the reform for eight more years, at which point, we will have closed the achievement gap."

Among the most encouraging findings was that some of the sharpest gains were achieved in low performing schools, such as the Annie Fisher, Clark, M.L. King, Wish, Kennelly and Simpson-Waverly elementary schools and the Quirk Middle School.

Moreover, every grade level went up in reading for perhaps the first time since the tests have been administered and Dwight Elementary School became the first non-magnet neighborhood school to advance to the "Goal Range," Hartford's highest achievement category. Dwight also scored the highest reading scores in the district.

The district also met six of the seven performance targets that are considered key indicators of improved learning. Third-grade reading rose 4.2 percent. Fourth-grade mathematics rose by 3.9 percent. Fifth-grade writing jumped 7.1 percent. Seventh-grade mathematics went up 7.5 percent. Eighth-grade science climbed 6 percent and 10th grade reading went up .4 percent. The one disappointment was 10th grade writing, which fell by 4.1 percent.

Hartford's CAPT test results were mixed. Although 10th graders at Bulkeley High School, Pathways to Technology and the University High School for Science and Engineering posted significant gains, the district's score fell due to a drop in performance at Weaver and Hartford Public High School, as well as the city's best performing high schools, Classical Magnet and Capital Preparatory Magnet. Classical and Capital nevertheless remain at Goal Range with full autonomy.

In 2008, Hartford registered the first increase in CMT and CAPT in seven years. An unprecedented 16 schools surpassed expectations. CMT scores alone improved by 2.3 percent, more than three times the rate for the entire state.

"This is very encouraging news," said Ada M. Miranda, chairperson of the Hartford Board of Education. "Two years straight of significant improvement is good evidence that our reform strategy is working and more importantly; we are proving that when taught by great teachers, our kids can learn and achieve at high levels. I thank the students, parents and teachers; their hard work and support are what ultimately make our efforts a success."

Under its reform strategy, the district grants increased amounts of autonomy to schools that show high and improved performance on the CMT and CAPT. Underperforming schools face intervention by the central administration or replacement with a proven school model.

Test results are incorporated into the district's School Performance Matrix, which tracks the progress of each school. The updated matrix now shows that fewer schools are in the redesign and intervention categories, and far more schools are either in defined autonomy or full autonomy.

"This is a strong return on our continued investment in education," said Mayor Eddie A. Perez, who also serves as a member of the Board of Education. "By constructing new schools that provide a positive learning environment, and raising standards, expectations, and accountability of students and staff, we will continue to build on this success in an effort to close the achievement gap. Congratulations students and staff on this terrific achievement."

This fall, the district plans to open five new or redesigned schools as part of the second phase of implementing an all choice system of schools. They include the Insurance and Finance Academy (High School Inc.), the Journalism Academy, the Teacher Preparatory Academy, the OPPortunity High School and the America's Choice School at SAND Elementary School.

Dr. Adamowski credited the strong instructional leadership and tireless work of Hartford's public school teachers and principals for the gains in student achievement.

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